

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2671

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENNA 4012

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, AU

SUBJECT: CANDIDATES FOR AUSTRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CHOSEN

REF: VIENNA 3733

1. SUMMARY: AS EXPECTED, SOCIALISTS PICKED FOREIGN MINISTER KIRCHSCHLAEGER ON APRIL 30 AS THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. PEOPLE'S PARTY PROVOKED SURPRISE ON MAY 2 BY PASSING OVER EX-VICE CHANCELLOR WITHALM AND CHOOSING INSTEAD INNSBRUCK MAYOR LUGGER. LAST MINUTE CHANGE ENGINEERED BY CABAL OF PARTY LEADERS IN WESTERN AUSTRIA WHO SUCCESSFULLY PERSUADED REST OF LEADERSHIP TO SELECT LUGGER, CANDIDATE WITH IMAGE OF BEING WINNER. LUGGER, HOWEVER, FACES NUMBER OF HANDICAPS WHICH HE IS UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO OVERCOME IN BRIEF SIX WEEKS CAMPAIGN. SOCIALISTS, WHO SENSE VICTORY IN MAKING, ARE DETERMINED TO WIN BIG, AS PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT OF SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT POLICIES. KIRCHSCHLAEGER OR LUGGER AS PRESIDENT IS EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE FROM VIEWPOINT OF U.S. INTERESTS. BARRING LAST MINUTE SURPRISES, KIRCHSCHLAEGER STILL EXPECTED TO TAKE PRESIDENCY IN JUNE 23 ELECTION BY ADEQUATE MARGIN. END SUMMARY.

2. SOCIALIST PARTY LEADERS MET APRIL 30, ONLY
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ONE DAY FOLLOWING STATE FUNERAL OF PRESIDENT

JONAS, AND, AS ANTICIPATED, NOMINATED BY UNANIMOUS VOTE FOREIGN MINISTER KIRCHSCHLAEGER TO BE PARTY'S STANDARD BEARER FOR OFFICE OF PRESIDENCY. SPEED WITH WHICH NOMINATION MOVED BY CHANCELLOR KREISKY, MAIN SUPPORTER AND PROMOTER OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S CANDIDACY, PROMPTED BY TWO BASIC CONSIDERATIONS: 1) PREVENT DISCUSSION WITHIN PARTY OVER DESIRABILITY OF CANDIDACY OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER WHO IS NOT PARTY MEMBER AND 2) ASSURE HOLDING OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON JUNE 23, NOT IN FALL WHICH WOULD BE OF GREATER ADVANTAGE TO OPPOSITION.

3. SOCIALIST FORMULA FOR VICTORY AT POLLS, AS REFLECTED IN INITIAL CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES, FORESEES KIRCHSCHLAEGER MAKING MAJOR EFFORT TO WIN SUPPORT OF NON-MARXIST VOTERS. ACCORDINGLY, KIRCHSCHLAEGER BEING CHARACTERIZED AS SERIOUS, HONEST, UNPRETENTIOUS PERSON, POSSESSED OF OBJECTIVITY AND SOCIAL CONSCIENCE. AT SAME TIME, KIRCHSCHLAEGER, ABLE ASSISTED BY SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT, HAS MOVED QUICKLY TO COVER HIMSELF IN TWO AREAS--DEFENSE POLICY AND LEGAL ABORTIONS--WHERE HE IS SOMEWHAT POLITICALLY VULNERABLE.

ON DEFENSE MATTERS, HE HAS ALREADY MADE NUMBER OF STATEMENTS SUGGESTING THAT WERE HE TO BE ELECTED, HE WOULD, AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF ARMED FORCES, PROVIDE FOR MORE VIABLE, CREDIBLE AUSTRIAN DEFENSE FORCES. DISCUSSION IN PRESS IN RECENT WEEKS OF POSSIBLE PURCHASE BY GOA OF INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT, RADAR EQUIPMENT AND HELICOPTERS SUGGESTS SIMILAR SERIOUSNESS OF INTENT AND SHOULD PROVE HELPFUL TO KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S CANDIDACY. AS REGARDS ABORTIONS WHICH, ACCORDING TO SOCIALIST-ADOPTED BILL, WILL NO LONGER CARRY CRIMINAL SANCTIONS BEGINNING JANUARY 1975, KIRCHSCHLAEGER HAS ATTEMPTED TO MAKE DISTINCTION THAT ALTHOUGH MEMBER OF SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT, HE WAS NEVER ASKED TO SUPPORT SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT'S LEGAL ABORTION-ON-DEMAND BILL. IN ADDITION, KREISKY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT FAMILIES HAVING CHILDREN AFTER JUNE 1975 WILL RECEIVE A

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PAYMENT OF 16,000 SCHILLINGS (ABOUT \$850) FOR EACH CHILD. THIS MEASURE IS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO ASSIST KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S CANDIDACY IN CATHOLIC AUSTRIA BY SUGGESTING THAT SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT IS DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO DISCOURAGE DECISION FOR ABORTION.

4. IN CONTRAST TO SMOOTH ORCHESTRATION BY

SOCIALISTS OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S NOMINATION, CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY LEADERSHIP SURPRISED EVERYONE ON MAY 2 BY PASSING OVER WITHALM, CONSIDERED ODDS ON FAVORITE TO BE CHALLENGER, AND SELECTING INSTEAD INNSBRUCK MAYOR ALOIS LUGGER AS PARTY'S CANDIDATE. SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED CHANGE IN OVP SCENARIO HAD CERTAIN BYZANTINE ASPECT AND AGAIN LAID BARE RIVALRY IN PARTY BETWEEN RELATIVELY WEAK FEDERAL LEADERSHIP IN VIENNA AND PROVINCIAL LEADERS WHO RULE THEIR FIEFDOMS WITH FIRM HAND AND WHO REPRESENT REAL POWER IN PARTY. IT WAS PARTY CHIEFTAINS IN VORALBERG, TYROL AND SALZBURG WHO PROMOTED LUGGER'S CANDIDACY AND AFTER UPPER AUSTRIA AND STYRIA JOINED WEST AUSTRIAN RANKS, OVP FEDERAL LEADERSHIP IN VIENNA PUT TOGETHER FACE-SAVING SCENARIO WHICH SAW LUGGER GET NOMINATION BY UNANIMOUS VOTE. LAST MINUTE DECISION TO DROP

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENNA 4012

WITHALM AS CANDIDATE PROMPTED PRIMARILY BY WITHALM'S IMAGE OF TOUGH POLITICAL IN-FIGHTER AND OF PREVIOUS LOSER IN SEVERAL MAJOR POLITICAL CONTESTS, BOTH OF WHICH FELT TO BE BURDEN FOR CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENCY. EMBASSY SOURCE INDICATED CONFIDENTIAL POLL OF ELECTORATE, CONDUCTED BY OVP, SHOWED THAT IN KIRCHSCHLAEGER-WITHALM CONTEST, KIRCHSCHLAEGER WOULD WIN BY APPROXIMATELY 60 PERCENT WHEREAS A LUGGER CANDIDACY WOULD NARROW GAP

CONSIDERABLY.

5. LUGGER, IN CONTRAST, POSSESSES MORE OF CHARACTERISTICS CONSIDERED DESIRABLE IN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: FATHER IMAGE, EMPATHY WITH PUBLIC, STYLE AND APPEARANCE OF STATESMAN, TREMENDOUS ENERGY (KNOWN AS LOCOMOTIVE LUGGER), LONG EXPERIENCE IN DOMESTIC POLITICS, AND AURA OF BEING WINNER (REPEATEDLY ELECTED MAJOR OF INNSBRUCK; SUCCESS IN HAVING WINTER OLYMPICS SCHEDULED TWICE IN INNSBRUCK). LUGGER ENTERS PRESIDENCY RACE, HOWEVER, WITH NUMBER OF MAJOR HANDICAPS: SHORT PERIOD OF SIX WEEKS FOR CAMPAIGN, UNPREPAREDNESS OF FEDERAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS FOR LUGGER CANDIDACY, LIMITED EXPOSURE INTERNATIONALLY, AND LACK OF IDENTITY IN EASTERN AUSTRIA WHERE MAJORITY OF VOTERS ARE.

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6. STRATEGY OF OVP THEREFORE IS LIKELY TO BE ONE OF MAXIMUM MEDIA AND PUBLIC EXPOSURE FOR LUGGERS; IDENTIFYING KIRCHSCHLAEGER AS CANDIDATE OF MARXIST LEFT; AND HITTING ISSUES (E.G. DEFENSE, FOREIGN POLICY, LEGAL ABORTIONS, INFLATION, LIMITED DOMESTIC POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, NON-PARTY AFFILIATION) WHERE KIRCHSCHLAEGER IS FELT BY OVP TO BE SOMEWHAT VULNERABLE. THIS APPROACH, OVP BELIEVES, WILL ENABLE IT ALSO TO GATHER IN MAJORITY OF FREEDOM PARTY VOTE.

7. SOCIALIST LEADERS WHOSE POLITICAL FORTUNES HAVE BEEN ON DOWNTURN IN RECENT PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS AND WHO FEEL THEY HAVE LIKELY WINNER IN KIRCHSCHLAEGER, ARE DETERMINED TO WIN BIG ON JUNE 23. A MAJOR VICTORY WOULD HELP GREATLY TO COUNTER LIKELY UPCOMING MINOR DEFEAT IN LOWER AUSTRIA PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ON JUNE 9 AND LAY POLITICAL GROUNDWORK FOR SOCIALISTS POSSIBLY CALLING EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN FALL 1974 OR SPRING OF 1975.

8. FROM USG NATIONAL INTERESTS VIEWPOINT, BOTH CANDIDATES SEEM EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE. KIRCHSCHLAEGER IS WELL-KNOWN TO WASHINGTON AND EMBASSY VIENNA AND HAS IDENTICAL OR SIMILAR VIEWPOINTS WITH US ON ALL IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. HE IS A REALIST ON EAST-WEST RELATIONS AND HAS PUBLICLY CALLED FOR REALISTIC, VIABLE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EUROPE AND US. A KIRCHSCHLAEGER PRESIDENCY MIGHT ALSO GIVE SOME ADDED IMPETUS TO

ESTABLISHMENT OF MORE CREDIBLE, EFFECTIVE DEFENSE FORCES. WHILE LUGGER IS LESS WELL-KNOWN TO EMBASSY, HE HAS SOLID REPUTATION OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IN POLITICAL ARENA AND HIS PERSONAL CREDENTIALS ARE OF HIGHEST ORDER.

9. AT THIS JUNCTURE, KIRCHSCHLAEGER, ALTHOUGH FACING A MORE FORMIDABLE CANDIDATE IN LUGGER, STILL LOOKS UNBEATABLE AND WERE ELECTIONS HELD NOW, HE WOULD WIN BY A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY. BARRING
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THE UNEXPECTED OR UNANTICIPATED, KIRCHSCHLAEGER SHOULD WIN PRESIDENCY ON JUNE 23 BY ADEQUATE MARGIN.HUMES

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